

Advisers and their Students in the 21st Century: challenges for the graduate programs

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ABSTRACT – Advisers and their Students in the 21st Century: challenges for the graduate programs. This article aims to analyze how the academic mentoring is characterized, precisely the relationship between advisers and their students. Besides the participant observation, the methodology is based on the theoretical-bibliographic study of the subject. The analysis takes into account the orientation in the field of languages, to be precise: Portuguese for speakers of other languages, justified by the increasing internationalization of the Brazilian universities. The result shows lack of research, especially in Brazil. As a conclusion, the author recommends narrowing the relation among research, teaching and mentoring, adapting it to the 21st century, as well as providing specific training for the advisor.

Keywords: Academic Mentoring. Graduate Programs. Professional Qualification.

RESUMO – Orientandos e Orientadores no Século XXI: desafios da pós-graduação. Este artigo objetiva analisar como se caracteriza a orientação acadêmica, precisamente o relacionamento orientando-orientador. Além da observação participante, a metodologia sustenta-se no percurso teórico-bibliográfico do tema. A análise leva em conta a orientação na área de línguas, precisamente português para falantes de outras línguas, justificado pela crescente internacionalização das universidades brasileiras. O resultado mostra carência de estudos, sobretudo no Brasil. Como conclusão, a autora propõe estreitar a relação entre pesquisa, ensino e orientação, adequando-a ao século XXI, bem como garantir formação específica para o orientador.

Palavras-chave: Orientação. Programas de Pós-Graduação. Formação Profissional.

Introduction

Graduate programs in Brazil have been increasing in both qualitative and quantitative terms. *Stricto sensu* courses in private and public institutions have expanded especially since the year 2000, following the growth track of undergraduate courses in the two previous decades. For example, the number of programs in the area of Letras¹ and Linguistics has soared from 66, in 2000, to 156 in 2015 (Hora; Jorge; Morais, 2016, p. 4), considering the academic and professional programs. These data correspond to the last evaluation of the graduate courses, whose decentralization was celebrated by the evaluators during the Four-yearly Evaluation in 2017 (Capes, 2017).

In qualitative terms, the evaluations which were proposed by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES)² and the support given by the research funding agencies helped create a successful working standard for the national and international scientific activity.

Being carried out since undergraduate courses, the research finds its peak in the graduate programs, when the students who are accepted receive the title of master or doctor and can therefore act in the academic career or in public and private corporations.

In order to reach this goal, the candidate must demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language, earn the academic credits by doing the academic disciplines related to the subject of the research, pass the qualifying exam and, afterwards, present and defend the research to the members of the thesis evaluation committee.

All this process is guided by an advisor whose assignment is institutionalized by the academic tradition, which can be more or less strict, depending on the culture of each area. Advisor and advisee, therefore, are the most meaningful representation of graduate programs: the researches result from their work. This relevance has already been highlighted by researchers who dedicate their work to the theme:

By all that has been described, the core of the graduate system lies in academic mentoring. Complex, diverse and many times hard to be defined, the advisor-advisee relationship is not only extremely important for the development of the graduate course, but absolutely fundamental as an integral part of the process. Going through a range of pre-conditions, from competence to empathy, it concerns greatly about the success or failure of the graduate student, having implications that can be equally significant for the advisor and to the graduate program itself to which both of them are part of. Mutual professional humility, disposition and understanding are all part of this relationship (Ferreira; Furtado; Silveira, 2009, p. 171)³.

Contradictorily to the importance they both have in the results of graduate courses, there are few studies about the relationship between advisee-advisor, as well as a lack of clarity about the most productive procedures in the performance of both, as reported by researchers who focused on this theme such as Pithan e Vidal (2013, p. 80).

The national bibliography on this special pedagogical relationship between advisors and advisee in the scientific research is scarce. In some papers which focus on the practice of research and scientific methodology, very little attention or none at all is given to the mentoring process.

It is in this information void that this article aims to evaluate fruitful practices in the mentoring process. In order to narrow this approach, the present paper analyzes the theme focusing on the graduate programs for professionals of Portuguese to Speakers of Other Languages (PSOL), due to the fact that this area is growing in the job market either by teaching or in publishing houses, in the Brazilian or international market, requiring advisors to stimulate these professionals. The focus on PSOL graduate programs is also justified by the importance of this field in the process of internationalization of the higher education institutions.

Based on theoretical studies and on the practice that was observed, the methodology, as an exploratory feature, uses bibliographical research and participant observation, carried out during the advising sessions by the author, since 2009, both individually and in small groups. The systematization of these observations also took the research and field journals into account. Besides focusing on detailing competent ways to act as an advisor and advisee, this paper seeks to analyze these roles in the XXI century, with the changes imposed by technology on how to develop a research.

To this end, the literature on the subject is firstly presented: what is it like to advise academically?; how to advise?; what is the role of the advisor?; what about the role of the advisee? and introductory questions concerning this theme. After that, this paper shows why academic advising extends beyond the administrative and methodological procedures. General suggestions for advising are followed, as well as the specific case of advising in PSOL. Finally, the conclusion points to the correlation of the institutional, administrative and personal elements, placing them in the XXI century.

Who Advises the Advisor?

Academic advising is the most visible aspect in the course of post-graduation, because the conclusion of the research depends mostly on the commitment of advisor and advisee. Contradictorily to its undeniable importance for the success of the academic endeavor, there is little research on the theme both in the national and international literature. This gap, which has already been stated by researchers such as Leite Filho e Martins (2006), makes teachers who start working in post-graduation drift away, many times causing them to feel unprepared for the occupation and act intuitively, by trial and error, as some have already admitted (Davis, 2004).

In order to understand why there is no preparation for the advisor when he starts to perform this job, researchers such as Santos Filho and Carvalho, Martins and Haguette (apud Silva, 2008, p. 4) cast two hypotheses:

[...] the first one is that advisors are academically qualified in the area of research of the student and, the second one is that, once the advisor has successfully finished a research project, he would be able to teach research skills and report writing, such as thesis and dissertations⁴.

As a result, the advisors in the beginning of their career can only use their own experience as an advisee, acting intuitively, just like an uninitiated. The biggest problem in this deprofessionalization of academic mentoring is the waste of the talent of both advisors and advisees, the inaptitude, discouragement and possible withdrawals, which harms the academic and economic incentives for the program. Several authors have already indicated that the lack of clarity comes since the conceptualization of what involves academic mentoring, as noted by Silva (2008, p. 3-4, author's italics):

With regard to the activity of mentoring graduate projects, Bianchetti & Machado (2006) state that the graduate programs outline inaccurate and vague descriptions, without presenting which functions, activities, duties and behavior the advisors and advisee should follow. Martins (1999: 58) observes that due to this lack of precepts '[...] each advisor end up performing the function their way, as it pleases them, being guided by previous experiences or by explanations filled with value judgement [...]', showing, therefore, unpreparedness towards de activities of academic mentoring⁵.

In general, the programs elucidate bureaucratic and administrative matters, concerning deadlines, format of application forms, guidelines and general rules. Once one has met the formal demands, the candidates can apply for the vacancies offered for the master and doctorate programs, and the teachers can become certified to act as advisors. However, the advising activities per se, the roles of advisors and advisees, their rights and duties are frailly announced, when not completely ignored. Academic mentoring is treated as if it didn't imply a direct and intense interpersonal relationship, of which the completion of the dissertation or thesis, which can last from two to four year, sometimes more, depends on.

This way, the relationship between advisor and advisee is placed last and solving these conflicts can easily slip into stereotyped behaviors: if the final work is good, the advisors can emphasize their own participation; now if the work is unsuccessful, the advisees can allege flaws in the mentoring they received. Therefore, the immature impression commonly heard during undergraduate courses is repeated: *The teacher gave me 2,5 opposite to I got a 9,5*.

The lack of a clear guidance to what exactly is the function of both the advisor and advisee encourages such behavior and leaves problems which impair knowledge production untouched: "There are reports about the existence of teachers who are unprepared for the mentoring activity, also about the excess of advisees per advisors and about the lack of advisors who have time and are available for this activity"⁶.

Besides the operational procedures, the programs also usually tend to prioritize the methodological aspects of work. The obedience to the ABNT rules requires considerable attention in the making of the dissertation or thesis, sometimes rather than the attention that should be given to the theoretical underpinnings, developing of the research question, hypothesis and methodology description and the approach method. This tendency can be proven by the guidelines provided by the website of graduate programs which, in general, are limited to a summary of the ABNT 14724, concerning the presentation of academic papers. Such matters also emphasize how hard it is for universities to promote the “epistemological reinvention” (Moita Lopes, 2013, p. 22).

The fact is that the lack of detail about academic mentoring formally misrepresents this activity, besides opening a door for discontent:

Although most of advisors mention the need for the developing of a schedule and respecting what is defined by it such as activities to be performed and delivered by the advisee, correction and return of the corrected material as soon as possible, regular meetings according to the needs of either advisee or advisor, who sometimes mentions specific cases in which advisees do not complete their activities in the agreed deadline, disappear without giving any explanation, forcing the advisor to keep trying to contact them, unsuccessfully.

Advisees on the other hand, feel they are being harmed by not being seen by the advisor, and not receiving back the papers they sent for analysis. Therefore, respect to their rights and duties must be respected in order to grant success for the research (Viana; Veiga, 2010, p. 225)⁷.

The lack of research about this theme also results in scarce definitions about academic mentoring, such as, it's important to highlight, the one designed by the “[...] committee formed by the National Academies of Science and Engineering and de Institute of Medicine [which] defined by consensus: ‘Academic mentoring is a professional and also personal, dynamic and reciprocal relationship between professor and student’” (Ferreira; Furtado; Silveira, 2009, p. 170).

Once validated this definition implies that academic mentoring goes beyond the administrative and methodological procedures, parameters which are usually specified by graduate programs.

You [advisor] should be aware that most PhD students will experience a range of emotions throughout the life of their PhD and that these can have an impact on their performance and their needs from your supervision. Phillips & Pugh (2000) describe a common pattern:

Year 1 Enthusiastic – at the start of the project with lots of expectations and ambitions; Anxious – am I clever enough, when will they spot I am a fraud; Disappointed – I have not achieved as much as I expected; Isolated – feeling alone even when other PhD students are at hand.

Year 2 ‘Getting nowhere syndrome’ – boredom with the routine of research; Interested – really involved and having the confidence to solve problems; Frustrated – time con-

straints impact on capacity to follow all areas of interest. Year 3 Independent – less reliance on supervisor for knowledge of field; Job to be finished – the thesis becomes a task; Stressed! (University of Reading, 2013, p. 11).

Although these stages cannot be considered statistically, simply ignoring them can surely lead to problems, as stated by James and Baldwin (1999). Once the definition that advisor and advisee have a dynamic and personal relationship is accepted, how to deal with personal matters, in order to successfully accomplish the activities?

Academic Mentoring: tensions and expectations

As previously mentioned, most of the graduate programs restrict the description of the procedures to the administrative and methodological matters. However, academic mentoring elicits a close and hierarchical relationship between the involved parties, which creates a breeding ground for conflicts.

Academic mentoring, which has as its objective the production of a long-term scientific paper, is still a human relationship of influence, marked by vicissitudes such as proximity, divergence, disagreements, acceptance, suffering and gratitude (Bianchetti; Machado apud Silva, 2008, p. 2)⁸.

Since it is impossible to eliminate the human components from research making, some programs try to limit the areas of activity, for instance, by defining deadlines, general administrative procedures as being responsibility of the administrative department instead of the being responsibilities of the advisor. There are programs inclusively which specify that the advisor is not responsible for psychological matters, for example, the Graduate program in Communication of the University of Amsterdam (2010). In this perspective, the interventions of the advisor should be limited to the research itself.

This attempt to limit duties and responsibilities – of the administrative department, the advisor and advisee – can be a starting point for the professionalization of academic mentoring: defining the functions can help adjust the competences. However, one must know that the academic research is developed in the coexistence of the involved parties, and the personal relationship is intertwined with the scientific work, as well as with all activities which involve human beings.

Other pressures may also add to the idiosyncrasy of advisors and advisees, such as “[...] endogenous forces (related to the graduate program, the collective of work, to the institution for which the professor works), as well as exogenous forces (related to the funding institutions [...])” (Costa; Sousa; Silva, 2014, p. 843).

From this point of view, it seems useful to deal with expectations, because part of these conflicts comes from frustrated expectations. In what concerns the advisor, researches have already shown that “[...] the challenges faced by the advisors can be characterized by: (a) affective, (b) professional and (c) theoretical-methodological” (Viana; Veiga, 2010, p. 223). The same research shows that the definition of reading and oth-

er activities, the setting of deadlines and the frequency to the meetings are procedures which guide the work and clarify what is expected from both.

The expectations of the advisees can be summed up by wishing to receive a positive feedback from the advisor in what concerns the written production, as well as availability and friendly, open, solidary and encouraging attitude, besides expecting the advisor to be a role model in the research area and in life (Wadee et al., 2017). Some also display an expectation that the advisors will help them, by the end of the process, to get a good job.

When evaluating the advisor-advisee relationship, Leite Filho e Martins (2006, p. 99) found results that are quite revealing of possible conflicts: “[...] the advisors cherish technical characteristics of the advisees, while the advisees emphasize the affective and personal characteristics of the advisors”. Thus, the lack of synchrony in the expectations of both can cause divergences which hamper the accomplishment of the work.

How can the advisor act in order to create movements to overcome possible conflicts?

Academic Mentoring: operational procedures

The deprofessionalization can occur in the four academic practices that must be performed by the professor: teaching, research, administration and mentoring. This happens because didactic training, management knowledge, propensity for research developing and mentoring are not instinctive characteristics of university professors and they do not tend to be addressed to during undergraduate courses.

In the specific theme of this subject, part of the problems emerge from i) the lack of preparation to perform the function, and ii) the lack of knowledge about the function itself. These statements reinforce the importance of courses which focus on the preparation and training of academic advisors allowing them to develop their skills from the systematization of proposals, as well as allowing an exchange of experience between participant advisors and more experienced ones.

The central signalization is related to the need to consider academic mentoring as a specialized task of the teaching work, which indicates the need for developing general frameworks of mentoring, reflective guidelines of the practices, innovation of the guidelines (such as group mentoring, collaborative mentoring, distance mentoring). The central challenge for education/training of advisors would then be developing a specific capacitation for academic mentoring, besides defining the dedication load that should be put into academic mentoring; elevating the quality standard of doctoral education; intensifying the qualification of the doctorate student (Costa; Sousa; Silva, 2014, p. 829)⁹.

Consider the style at first, as well as beliefs, as decisive elements in the way each advisor acts. It is also worth remembering that style and beliefs change throughout the professional path, especially when

anchored in self-reflection and dialogs with peers. Besides that, advisers must adapt their style to the needs of each student, just as they are supposed to do when teaching different groups.

Therefore, the discussion on the different ways of monitoring does not have a prescriptive nature, but aims to establish practices which can contribute to the mentoring work, without disregarding the idiosyncrasy and background references of each agent in the process: the advisor and advisee.

One suggestion that has been pointed out as useful is establishing a protocol for activities in the first meeting. The good practice guide of the University of Reading suggests the advisor to discuss mutual expectations and explain what the advisee and advisor can expect or not from each other during the first meeting. It is also very useful to define the frequency, the time and the length of the meetings. Finally, the advisor must explain to the advisees that, in order to help them progress, they have to be ready to receive constructive criticism. To these observations by the document of Reading, we must add that, in this two-way interaction, both the advisor and advisee must be open to constructive criticism.

Louis (2014, p. 8) explains the relevance of having a schedule: "It's important to have regular meetings and to set writing deadlines. This will maintain a gentle pressure to produce work, and also form the habit of submitting and revising writing, which is a great way to develop a regular writing habit".

This referral contrasts with the results of researches that have already been carried out by Brazilian researchers, who found that: "[...] unsystematic, informal meetings, conducted only when the production of the research presented something new or when a contingency occurred [...]".

Among the competences to be developed and stimulated in master and doctorate students are: "[...] knowledge of substantive content of the area of concentration and the line of research; epistemological and methodological knowledge; knowledge about the teaching activity; knowledge about research practice and, at last, knowledge about writing production" (Costa; Sousa; Silva, 2014, p. 832).

Besides reading and the guided studies, these first meetings must also explain about plagiarism, defined as "[...] the use of ideas or verbal, oral or written formulations by someone else without clearly giving them proper credit, in order to create the reasonable impression that such ideas or formulations are of one's own authorship" (FAPESP, 2016).

Teaching the advisees about plagiarism is justified because

Although it is an ancient practice, framed by the legal codes, plagiarism has increased nowadays. *Searching* had become too easy and instant. By using the computer and the internet as sources of information, it is possible to copy and paste and knowledge with just some clicks. The growth of virtual learning (Distance Education) has also been observed as a favorable ground for plagiarism (Krokosz, 2011, p. 747)¹⁰.

The advisor is responsible for educating and instructing the students about the damages of the misappropriation of intellectual production, reminding them that the law establishes as penalty detention from three months to a year, or a fine (Pithan; Vidal, 2013).

To the written publication of research results, it is worth to add the oral disclosure, that happens in the presentation of papers in academic events, which is an activity that also requires learning persuasive practices: such as presenting oneself orally; the use of audiovisual resources, etc.

Besides the extent of the research, it must be considered that graduate courses do not focus solely on training researchers. Since the market forces the professionals to continuous training, both in *lato sensu* (specialization and further study) and *stricto sensu* (master and doctorate) courses, there are some graduate students who have already started working in a companies and do not wish to pursue the academic career.

In this regard, the advisor must show professional opportunities related to the theme of the research, besides promoting activities that lead to the growth of the advisee, such as presentation of papers in foreign countries, publishing in prestigious magazines, establish contact with other researchers of the area, both Brazilian and foreigners. Discussing about appropriate professional attitudes, ethics, exemplary postures are conducts which prepare the advisee for places other than the academy, aiming at their role in the society.

All of this assumes a permanent attitude of the advisor: listening to the advisee. In the urgency of daily obligations, it is difficult to know how to listen. Therefore, the advisor-advisee meetings must happen unhurriedly and must seek to diminish the asymmetry existing in the relationship. Just as the advisee, the advisor must be prepared in advance for these events, by remembering the research of each student particularly e presenting contributions to the theme. Based on dialog, the meeting guarantees the advisees to build their voice, their autonomy:

Learned as an advisor:

1. Listen to the student, understand them as a person. What are they doing a PhD for? Where are they going? What else is happening in their lives?
2. Encourage students to learn new techniques/try new methods/push themselves into new areas, not just do the safe things;
3. Encourage them to do side projects with other people;
4. It's all about the student (Louis, 2014, p. 2).

When the advisor takes the posture of the hegemonic power and knowledge holder, the students are impaired to build their voice, and from this arises insecurity, discouragement and dependency. Without denying the hierarchy, the relationship between them both must be developed in a cordial environment, in which mentoring is considered “[...] as an interpersonal process of mutual and continuous apprenticeship between the advisor and the advisees [...]” (Costa; Sousa; Silva, 2014, p. 844)¹¹. These authors highlight that in Brazil this relational horizontalization has happened since the 1970’s, which places the autocratic perspective in graduate courses as, at least, outdated.

In what concerns autonomy, it is the greatest controversy between advisors and advisees, resulting in complaints by both. The discontent results from different ways of conceptualizing autonomy, as stated by researchers of the theme.

But giving autonomy to students does not mean to be distant from them, in other words, not monitoring the performance of the advisee in the academic activities, in choosing the disciplines the student should enroll in and in the drafting of the final paper, for example. The academic mentoring covers these and other duties, however, teachers of graduate programs not always understand them like this, some of them seem to believe that by leaving the student alone they believe they are helping this student in the process of building autonomy. (Alves; Espindola; Bianchetti, 2012), because autonomy depends on factors such as willingness and motivation to learn, previous experience and self-knowledge. Understandings of this nature can generate feelings of insecurity, angst and impotence in the students and can even promote an evasion. Autonomy is related to engagement, not to distancing. Therefore, giving autonomy cannot be a synonym of “leaving the student alone”; on the contrary, this action must be based on the exchanges between the subjects who are in different social places in a discursive community, so as to allow this subject to get hold of a self-guided learning process (Knowles; Holton; Swanson, 2011). The advisor is the one who follows the steps of the advisee (Freitas, 2012) (Costa; Sousa; Silva, 2014, p. 843-844)¹².

Between the extremes – leaving the advisees to their own luck or do the work for them – then advisor must use common sense, avoiding attitudes that block the intellectual and human growth of the students. The improvement happens when the advisor dialogs with the advisees, comments on their paper with a critical eye and extends the theoretical-methodological mentoring to ethical, professional and social postures.

In the course of academic mentoring, the studies suggest that the most important procedure of all is encouraging writing. Writing, writing, writing leads to knowledge of the theme, because, without understanding it, it is not possible to explain the objective, the question, the hypothesis, the methodology and the results of the research in a clear, concise and logical redactional structure.

Simultaneous to reading, writing perseverance is what creates the research, clarify the ideas. Making the research mediated by reading and reflection is clearer in some areas, for example, in humanities and social science, “[...] the writing is the research (though based on many hours of reading)” (James; Baldwin, 1999, p. 20).

Since writing tends to be a hard to complete activity for most advisees (and not only for them), stating a deadline for dates on which students must send parts of the final work written, and after returned with comments, is one of the most concrete contributions that the advisor can do for the research.

According to Delamont et al, 2004, there are two useful golden rules to share with your students

1. Write early and write often:

→ The more you write the easier it gets;

→ If you write every day it becomes a habit;

→ Tiny bits of writing soon add up to something substantial;

→ The longer you leave it unwritten, the worse the task becomes.

2. Don't get it right, get it written:

→ Until something is on paper, no one can help you to get it right;

→ Drafting is a vital stage in clarifying thought;

→ Start writing the part that is clearest in your head, not necessarily what will be read first;

→ Drafting reveals the bits that need more work better than any other process" (University of Reading, 2013, p. 13).

Once the habit of leaving everything for last minute is recurrent, the advisors contribute decisively if they can convince their students that writing takes time, reflection, adjusting of ideas and verbal structure. Writing always and since the beginning give students time for further, and necessary, editing of the text, when the author can realize some mistakes in form and content made in the first draft.

The advisor must make comments that were not perceived by the advisee during writing. In order to make a reflective reading that will contribute to the research, the advisor must receive the paper in adequate time for reading, commenting and returning it. With exception of inexorable unforeseen events, accepting overdue papers hinders the training of the student, because, in addition to not making it possible for the advisor to read it attentively, who will have to read it under pressure due to the deadline, it also opens space for indiscipline and disorganization.

In this exhibition, the importance of evaluating academic mentoring beyond the methodological point of view, considering the behavior and relationship of advisor and advisee is made clear, because the master and doctorate works result from it. Researchers have already conceptualized cherished behaviors in both, such as:

Thereby, some qualities become vital for the advisor, apart from appropriate knowledge and experience: professionalism, interest, flexibility, patience, communication, creativity, respect, honesty, responsibility, organization, the respect between the parties and the integration with an international net of contacts. On the other hand, it is up for the advisee: motivation, objectivity, curiosity, enthusiasm, ambition, respect, self-discipline and dedication (Ferreira; Furtado, 2009, p. 172)¹³.

These qualities are not exclusive of either one or the other. Interest is also essential for the advisee, dedication is necessary for the advisor and respect is valid for both, as well as accepting their own limitations. Still, the systematization of predicates helps to understand the role of each one in the drafting of the final work.

In this way, listing successful procedures in academic mentoring may help guarantee a good evaluation of the programs. For the advisee, this translates into committing to the program, writing since the beginning and be extremely cautious in order to avoid plagiarism. In what concerns the advisors, it is worth to diminish the asymmetry, listen to the advisee and define activities that contribute to the academic and professional experience of the advisees.

The programs contribute by providing physical structure for the academic mentoring to happen: do advisors have rooms in which they can have private mentoring sessions? Besides, do programs provide clear rules of the selective process as well as norms and regulations? Is there a defined policy for promoting the participation in academic events and publishing papers, as well as for providing scholarships? Finally, it is fundamental to professionalize academic mentoring, by establishing fruitful practices in the advisor-advisee relationship.

Among the suggestions for improvement of scholars, one can find the regular presentation of seminars of research, in which the students can present their research, which will be discussed and commented by the present audience (Davis, 2004). This practice has already been happening in several programs, but it is important to consolidate the effective participations of the advisors, whose presence in the debates values the work of the students and boosts their self-esteem.

Obviously the particularities of each area define singular procedures, as one can notice in mentoring related to teaching a foreign language.

Mentoring in the 21st Century: the context of PSOL

Technology has changed the way humans relate to the world. In shopping, leisure, in social relationships, at work, all is done in ways which would be unthinkable a few years ago, and changes don't stop happening. All these changes also transform the way to acquire knowledge: in person, distance, with printed or virtual material, through *Sky-pe*, videoconference, educational objects, academic websites, online search engines, etc.

No matter how slow the educational institution is to integrate changes, the technology which is available nowadays has considerably changed the way people do research. Before, the presence of the researcher in libraries was indispensable, followed by binder consultation, which would show on which shelf you would find what you were looking for. Today, digital libraries are real, and the universities disclose the consultation to thesis and dissertations online. There is also partnership between universities, which favors the access to information.

Apart from the academic context, several other pieces of information can easily be accessed on the internet. What is the role of academic mentoring in this environment of physical and virtual research? In what ways can the advisor help the advisee when the wide range of access can impair selection? A first recommendation that should be given by the advisor to the advisee is how to distinguish contents, how to discard

pseudoscience, common sense, opinion, how to recognize scientific approaches.

Online scientific journals which are highly ranked in the area, with a well defined publication policy and blind evaluation by pairs fulfill parameters of reliability. Online search engines may be a first step, but after it is necessary to submit the results to careful evaluation of authorship: is it a single person, or an institution? Public or private? The year of publication, the references, grammar correction, argumentative backing – all these textual subtleties provide clues for data checking.

The advisor plays a relevant role by helping the advisee to establish selection criteria for materials available online, helping them to identify reliable sources. The ideal is that this digital literacy should start in elementary school, preparing the scientific look of the student. Once this is done, videos, e-classes and all sorts of educational objects can be used as sources of knowledge.

The fact is that technologies have completely changed social and economical arrangements, which ended up by giving centrality to education and, since the production became dependent on complex communicative processes, linguistic knowledge is the core of essential resources. Knowing your native language as well as foreign languages is fundamental in order to allow the person to transit through different cultures which are increasingly closer, interdependent and interrelated.

This proximity between cultures, result of the easy access to technologies and international trips, has expanded the boundaries of science, which is not marked by geographic barriers anymore. By the use of internet, students can get in touch with colleagues in other countries, they can look for advisors who study similar themes, and they can get connected to international research groups.

In the complexity of this scientific network, the institutional internationalization is a consolidated reality in most of public and private institutions in Brazil. By means of partnerships with universities abroad, Brazilians carry out part of their studies in under graduate or graduate courses in a different country, as well as undergraduate or graduate foreign students come to do internships in several areas in which the Brazilian science stands out.

It is in this multilingual and multicultural context that teaching Portuguese for speakers of other languages (PSOL) attracts graduate students to Brazil. In the universities abroad in which the Portuguese language is offered, the Portuguese of Brazil is highly appreciated, because of its having strong appeal in the international market due to positive impact of soap operas, music and, most recently, cinematographic successes.

The proficiency exam Celpe-Bras is mandatory for the foreign students who come to Brazil to study. It is important to remember that the number of enrollments for the exams, which are administered in several places in Brazil and in other 35 countries, has increased. (Exame, 2016, on-line).

This way, foreign students can initiate their education in their home country and come to Brazil to earn part of their master or doc-

torate credits. This demand for Portuguese of Brazil is not something new and has been increasing in recent years, bringing heterogeneity to courses of PSOL already stated by scholars.

With the growing interest for the study of Portuguese language in foreign universities and the increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions which offer courses in similar areas, it's been observed, in parallel, that this public of apprentices is not a uniform group and of homogeneous nature, but rather, carry elements of different interests, family background, and sociolinguistic competences. Such heterogeneity has been creating a new path to be considered in terms of planning and direction of the courses of Portuguese for Speakers of Other Languages (PSOL) both in Brazil and abroad (Silva, 2016, p. 87)¹⁴.

This heterogeneity is one of the issues that need to be addressed to in terms of mentoring, because cultural barriers can vigorously interfere in the advisor-advisee relationship. "All students bring particular expectations of teaching and learning, and of teacher-learner relationships, derived from their own cultures. Of course, academics also have culturally determined frames of reference". (James; Baldwin, 1999, p. 10).

However, heterogeneity is one of the critical areas in the educational system: the tendency of schools is to homogenize, a contrary movement towards the centrality of interests and the individuality of each student suggested by current teaching practices, such as Problem Based Learning, just to quote a current pedagogical proposal (Araújo; Sastre, 2009).

From this point of view, besides having good theoretical education on interculturality, it would be appropriate for the advisors to have lived abroad. It would allow them to have more than just theoretical knowledge about the process of adaptation in a context of cultural and linguistic immersion.

The institutions get ready to receive these exchange students, by means of welcoming events to offer preliminary information for foreigners. However, the guidelines, in general, focus on legal aspects of documents (such as how to get a student visa and the National Registry of Foreigners)¹⁵ and geographical location of the university *campus* and the city.

The grouping of foreigners is done firstly based on primary identities, that is to say, it is based on national, geographical, territorial, ethnic, religious similarities. Consequently, what is seen is practically and erasure of internationalization, since the students do not interact with the local community. The objective of most, in these first contacts with the new culture, is to create a comfort zone and want to be acknowledged by the group, resulting in the tendency to remain with other foreigners, without blending with the local inhabitants.

Being the concrete reference to initiate their inclusion in the culture of the host country requires a great deal of sensibility. It is necessary to have a distance gaze of their own culture, in order to avoid stereotypes and make the advisee feel confident to transit through new

social codes. The ideal is to have open attitudes, deconstructing inevitable generalizations in the search for stable references.

Verbal communication, which is essential for socializing, may be at first a source of stress, because it is all marked by cultural aspects, and the differences do not happen only in the linguistic elements per se. Paralinguistic traces – the vocal intensity, the intonation, the silence, the pauses, etc – and the non-verbal traces – the gestures, eye contact, physical touch, body language, etc. – are all culturally determined elements, and not following them may lead to embarrassing situations. Therefore, the mentoring space gains linguistic and cultural plurality and starts being influenced by cognitive, behavioral and affective matters. Among the Brazilians who want to be educated as a PSOL teacher, the advisor finds advisees in different groups:

1. people who teach PSOL in language schools, but were not formally educated in PSOL;
2. people who were formally educated in PSOL in an undergraduate course, but have never taught it;
3. people who were formally educated in PSOL and work in the area;
4. people who do not have formal theoretical or practical education in PSOL, but see a possibility to work in the area.

The reason for this diversity is justified by the increase in demand for PSOL teachers combined with the scarce offer of training courses for teachers in this area. The advisor, in these cases, must encourage the reading of the basic bibliography of the area and of current themes, in accordance with background education.

In any case, it is essential to lead the student through reflections about current themes in the area: the didactic material used in PSOL, for example, presents gaps that need to be filled by scholars. In the professional domain, the advisors do a good job when they help the advisee detect niche markets, preparing them for the scenario they will find once they finish their graduate course.

This prospective look is more and more complex, because it involves several variables in the constant and fast paced changes caused by technology. The development of applications which can assist PSOL teaching, for example, would bring a considerable progress to the area. Acting in the field would bring benefits for both the advisor and the advisee, by the uniqueness in the choice of the research object.

It is important to remember that the benefits of a relationship are not one-sided. For the advisee, it results in personal, professional and academic growth, encouragement, guidance, development of critical thinking, independence and self-confidence. Now for the advisor, it brings about the increase of personal satisfaction, motivation, an opportunity to keep updated in terms of techniques and knowledge, an increase the ability to attract new collaborators for current and future projects, besides providing an opportunity to 'build a legacy' in future generations in the line of research (Ferreira; Furtado; Silveira, 2009, p. 172)¹⁶.

While languages which have longer tradition in the teaching of foreigners already possess a large amount of materials available online, both in the format of exercises and video presentations, Portuguese teaching still timidly appears online. The mere existence of e-classes that are open to public, as some Brazilian universities have been doing, allows the foreigner to practice oral comprehension of the Portuguese language.

Educational games deserve to be studied by scholars, as well as blogs, videos such as *youtube*, *facebook*, etc. In order to sum up, it is about acknowledging that “[...] technology breaks the boundaries between the activity domains. Accepting this change and consider it for the development of pedagogies is a big challenge for all the learning fields, including in the learning of a second language” (Barton; Lee, 2015, p. 181)¹⁷.

Besides technological orientation, the graduate courses also need to break down the structural rigidity of the programs, as it has already been stated by recent documents in the area: “The great challenge of graduate courses in Letras¹⁸ and Linguistics is to meet the demands brought by the 21st century which cannot be answered by disciplinarization, compartmentalization and in knowledge sharing” (Hora; Jorge; Morais, 2016, p. 7)¹⁹.

This search for new viable ways for education in general, and for PSOL specifically, can be based on experiences that already exist, for example Escuela 21, directed by Calvo (2016). The methodology proposed by this Spanish psychologist and researcher aims the integration of technology in the classroom. In his book, he describes his experience in schools of Bogota, Barcelona, Sidney, New York, San Francisco, Manchester, São Paulo, Copenhagen, Buenos Aires etc. Reading about these educational experiences may serve as inspiration for advisors and advisees who are seeking for the innovation of pedagogical practices in the Brazilian context.

Conclusion

The theoretical path traced by this present article shows that studies on how to carry out academic mentoring are more common abroad than in the Brazilian literature. In general, the Brazilian graduate programs disclose information about lines of research, areas of concentration, administrative and methodological matters. At the same pace, articles about graduate programs do not evaluate the impact that the advisor-advisee relationship causes to the quality of the research. It is the same attitude taken towards plagiarism, a subject that has not been widely explored in the national literature, accentuating the tendency of the Brazilian educational system to be more punitive than educational.

The function of academic mentoring still lacks studies which discuss its professionalization, and that go beyond the proven improvising. Since academic mentoring is still not well defined, at least in the national bibliography, it seems relevant to include one more important knowledge to be taught

to the advisees, which is, the ethic know-how (Pithan; Vidal, 2013, p. 81)²⁰.

The damage of having this conduct is the deprofessionalization of academic mentoring, even though its being essential for the results of the graduate courses. The lack of professionalization also happens in other academic contexts: not all teachers have didactic education nor do they have management knowledge to work in administrative positions.

What is proposed, then, is that the political pedagogical project of graduate courses should include, besides the curriculum, explicit definitions concerning academic mentoring. This recommendation is based on the assumption that, if there is a reference model, bearing information that does not limit the autonomy of the advisor and advisee when making decisions, it may improve graduate programs on the whole, resulting in successful researches.

Besides the technical content and enrichment of the cultural capital, graduate courses must also address to personal and inter-relational components. Adapting academic mentoring to the 21st century involves dealing with themes such as independence, ability to evaluate the reliability of virtual production, ethical postures and an effective anti-plagiarism conduct, continuous training to keep up with the constant changes in the several learning areas, besides the urgent technological literacy.

In this positive perspective, once the accreditation of the teacher in graduate programs is accepted, it is recommended to receive the educational training to act as an academic advisor, just as it has been encouraged by Capes: “[...] seminaries with the objective of evaluating the profile of the former student and the way programs have contributed for the education and training of the researcher and the teacher” (Hora; Jorge; Morais, 2016, p. 6)²¹.

Ultimately, it is about professionalizing the practice, it is about appreciating the performance of advisors and advisees, which has already been acknowledged by some studies.

The fourth central theme investigated the association between the quality of a thesis or dissertation and the mentoring that was received. The advisees were emphatic to relate that the advisor performed a crucial role in the process of making the final work and, therefore, cherished a relation with the received mentoring. In the point of view of the advisors, they were unanimous in relating that the quality of work would be related to the mentoring received, pointing out some characteristics of the subjects, such as, dialog between the parties, reading and building a theoretical background, suggestions of paths to follow, engagement of the students in the process and empathy between the subjects. [...] (Leite Filho; Martins, 2006, p. 106)²².

Sequencing this theoretical study, adding other voices and experiences to it will help establish good practices and effective contributions both for the advisor and for the program itself, with implications

that are not limited to higher education politics: well educated graduate students will be ready to act in the academy, in the corporative universe and in the society.

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Notes

- 1 The study of Languages and Literature in Brazil.
- 2 Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel
- 3 Translation of: “Por tudo já descrito, o ponto central do sistema de PG reside na orientação. Complexa, diversificada e por vezes difícil de ser definida, a relação orientador-orientando é não apenas extremamente importante para o desempenho de uma PG, mas absolutamente fundamental enquanto parte integrante do processo. Passando por uma gama de pré-condições, da competência à empatia, ela se prende boa parte do sucesso ou insucesso de um pós-graduando, com implicações que podem ser igualmente significativas para seu orientador e para o próprio Programa a que ambos pertencem. Humildade profissional, disposição e compreensão mútuas perpassam a relação” (Ferreira; Furtado; Silveira, 2009, p. 171).
- 4 Translation of: “[...] A primeira, de que os orientadores são academicamente qualificados na área de pesquisa do estudante e, a segunda, de que, tendo o orientador concluído com sucesso um projeto de pesquisa, estaria apto a ensinar as habilidades de pesquisa e de redação de relatórios, tais como teses e dissertações”.
- 5 Translation of: “Em relação à atividade de orientação de trabalhos, Bianchetti & Machado (2006) afirmam que os programas de pós-graduação enunciam descrições imprecisas e vagas, sem a apresentação de quais seriam as funções, atividades, deveres e condutas de orientadores e de orientandos. Martins (1999, p. 58) observa que, em decorrência dessa ausência de preceitos, “[...] *cada orientador acaba desempenhando suas funções à sua maneira, como lhe convém, guiando-se por experiências passadas ou por justificativas carregadas de juízos de valor [...]*”, mostrando, portanto, despreparo para as atividades de orientação”.
- 6 Translation of: “Há relatos sobre a existência de professores despreparados para a atividade de orientação, de excesso de alunos orientandos por professores orientadores e da carência de orientadores com tempo e disponibilidade para este fim” (Piccinin apud Silva, 2008, p. 3).
- 7 Translation of: “Apesar de a maioria dos orientadores mencionar a necessidade de elaboração de um cronograma e de respeitar o que nele está definido como atividades a serem desenvolvidas e entregues pelo orientando, correção e devolução dentro da maior brevidade possível, encontros periódicos conforme a necessidade do orientando ou do orientador, este menciona casos em que o orientando não cumpre as atividades no prazo acordado, desaparece sem dar satisfação, forçando-o a ficar tentando contato sem êxito. O orientando, por sua vez, sente-se prejudicado por não ser recebido pelo orientador, por não receber a devolutiva dos textos que entregou para análise. Assim, o respeito aos direitos e deveres de ambos precisa ser respeitado para o êxito do trabalho” (Viana; Veiga, 2010, p. 225).

- 8 Translation of: “A orientação, que tem por objetivo a produção de um trabalho científico de fôlego, não deixa de ser uma relação humana de influência, eivada de vicissitudes como proximidade, divergência, discordância, aceitação, sofrimento e gratificação” (Bianchetti; Machado apud Silva, 2008, p. 2).
- 9 Translation of: “A sinalização central é relativa à necessidade de se considerar a orientação como uma tarefa especializada do trabalho docente, o que indica a necessidade de desenvolvimento de *frameworks* gerais de orientação, de modelos reflexivos das práticas, de inovações de modelos (como orientação de grupo, orientação colaborativa, orientação a distância). O desafio central da educação/formação de orientadores seria, então, desenvolver uma capacitação específica para a orientação, além de definir uma carga de dedicação destinada à orientação; elevar o padrão de qualidade da formação doutoral; e intensificar a experiência de formação do discente de doutorado”.
- 10 Translation of: “Embora seja prática antiga, enquadrada pelos códigos jurídicos, o plágio vem aumentando na atualidade. *Pesquisar* tornou-se muito fácil e instantâneo. Usando um computador e a internet como fonte de informação, é possível copiar e colar qualquer conhecimento com apenas alguns cliques. O crescimento da aprendizagem virtual (Educação a Distância) também tem sido observado como terreno propício para o aumento do plágio”.
- 11 Translation of: “[...] como um processo interpessoal de aprendizagem mútua e contínua entre o orientador e seus orientandos [...]” (Costa; Sousa; Silva, 2014, p. 844).
- 12 Translation of: “Mas dar autonomia aos alunos não significa distanciar-se dele, ou seja, não acompanhar o orientando no desempenho das atividades acadêmicas, na escolha das disciplinas a serem cursadas e na preparação do trabalho final, por exemplo. A orientação acadêmica abrange essas e outras tarefas, porém, nem sempre é essa a compreensão dos professores de pós-graduação, alguns dos quais parecem acreditar que deixar o aluno sozinho vai auxiliá-lo no seu processo de formação de autonomia (Alves; Espíndola; Bianchetti, 2012), pois a autonomia depende de fatores como disposição e motivação para aprender, experiências prévias e autoconhecimento. Compreensões dessa natureza podem gerar nos orientandos sentimentos de insegurança, angústia e impotência e até promover uma evasão. A autonomia está relacionada com envolvimento, não com distanciamento. Por isso, dar autonomia não pode ser sinônimo de ‘deixar o aluno sozinho’; ao contrário, essa ação deve estar fundamentada na troca entre sujeitos que estão em lugares sociais diferentes dentro da comunidade discursiva, para que esse sujeito se aproprie de um processo de aprendizagem autodirecionada (Knowles; Holton; Swanson, 2011). O orientador é aquele que acompanha os passos de seu orientando (Freitas, 2012)” (Costa; Sousa; Silva, 2014, p. 843-844).
- 13 Translation of: “Assim, algumas qualidades tornam-se indispensáveis a um orientador, além do conhecimento e experiência apropriados: profissionalismo, interesse, flexibilidade, paciência, comunicação, criatividade, respeito, honestidade, responsabilidade, organização, o respeito de seus pares e a integração com uma rede internacional de contatos. Por outro lado cabe aos alunos orientandos: motivação, objetividade, curiosidade, entusiasmo, ambição, respeito, autodisciplina e dedicação” (Ferreira; Furtado, 2009, p. 172).
- 14 Translation of: “Com o crescente interesse pelo estudo da língua portuguesa nas universidades estrangeiras e o aumento no número de alunos matriculados nas instituições de ensino superior que oferecem cursos em áreas afins, observou-se, em paralelo, que esse público de aprendizes não constitui um grupo uniforme e de natureza homogênea, mas sim, comporta elementos de diferentes interesses, históricos familiares e competências sociolinguísticas. Tal

heterogeneidade vem constituindo um novo caminho a se considerar em termos de planejamento e direcionamento dos cursos de Português para Falantes de Outras Línguas (PFOL) tanto no Brasil quanto no exterior” (Silva, 2016, p. 87).

15 Registro Nacional de Estrangeiros – RNE.

16 Translation of: “É importante lembrar de que os benefícios de uma relação não são unilaterais. Para o orientando, resulta em crescimentos pessoal, profissional e acadêmico, encorajamento, direção, desenvolvimento de senso crítico, independência e autoconfiança. Já para o orientador ocasiona em aumento da satisfação pessoal, estímulo, oportunidade de manter-se atualizado em termos de técnicas e conhecimento, aumento da habilidade para atrair novos colaboradores para projetos atuais e futuros, além de proporcionar oportunidade para ‘criar um legado’ em gerações futuras na linha de pesquisa” (Ferreira; Furtado; Silveira, 2009, p. 172).

17 Translation of: “[...] a tecnologia rompe fronteiras entre os domínios de atividade. Aceitar essa mudança e levá-la em conta na elaboração de pedagogias é um grande desafio para todos os campos de aprendizagem, incluindo a aprendizagem de uma segunda língua” (Barton; Lee, 2015, p. 181).

18 The study of Languages and Literature in Brazil.

19 Translation of: “O grande desafio da pós-graduação em Letras e Linguística é responder às demandas trazidas pelo século XXI que não encontram respostas na disciplinarização, na compartimentalização e na divisão dos saberes” (Hora; Jorge; Morais, 2016, p. 7).

20 Translation of: “A função de orientação científica ainda carece de estudos que tratem da sua profissionalização, para além do improvisado constatado. Já que a função de orientar ainda não está bem delineada na bibliografia, ao menos nacional, parece pertinente incluir ainda mais um importante conhecimento a ser ensinado aos orientandos, qual seja, o *know how* ético” (Pithan; Vidal, 2013, p. 81).

21 Translation of: “[...] seminários com o objetivo de avaliar o perfil do egresso e como os programas têm contribuído para a formação do pesquisador e do professor” (Hora; Jorge; Morais, 2016, p. 6).

22 Translation of: “O quarto eixo temático investigou a associação entre a qualidade de uma tese ou dissertação e a orientação recebida. Os orientandos foram enfáticos em relatar que o orientador exercia um papel crucial no processo de construção do trabalho final e, portanto, guardava uma relação com a orientação recebida. Na visão dos orientadores, estes foram unânimes ao relatar que a qualidade do trabalho teria relação com a orientação recebida, destacando-se algumas características dos sujeitos, tais como o diálogo entre as partes, leituras e embasamento teórico, indicação de caminhos, engajamento dos alunos no processo e empatia entre os sujeitos [...]” (Leite Filho; Martins, 2006, p. 106).

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